

*Finding the
Family in*



**Comprehensive School
Reform Models**

About the Region III Comprehensive Center

The Region III Comprehensive Center (R3CC) is one of 15 Comprehensive Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education to provide technical assistance to educators in states, local school districts, schools, tribes, and other recipients of funds authorized under the 1994 Improving America's Schools Act (IASA). Fiscal Year 2001–2002, which runs from October 1 through September 30, is a year of transition that bridges the final year of IASA and the startup of the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The service area of the Region III Comprehensive Center includes Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. The Center is a project of The George Washington University Center for Equity and Excellence in Education in partnership with RMC Research Corporation, Research for Better Schools, and ESCORT at SUNY, Oneonta.

The goal of the Region III Comprehensive Center is to improve student achievement by informing and assisting the practices of educators working within existing public school systems and state education agencies. The Center works with state education agencies, intermediate units, and low-performing and high-poverty schools to ensure the successful implementation of school reform initiatives and support the needs of special student populations. Special student populations include migrant, limited English proficient (LEP), neglected and delinquent, and other designations under IASA.

The Center's mission is to provide high quality technical assistance services to state and local education agencies and schools to facilitate the success of education reform and school improvement initiatives.

Title XIII of IASA requires that *all* students, including those served under Elementary and Secondary Education Act programs, receive the same opportunity as all other students to achieve high content and performance standards. The Region III Comprehensive Center employs research-based strategies to assist staff and educators within state and local education agencies to model "best practices," improve pedagogical skills, or otherwise build capacity. Technical assistance providers from the Center offer services that include, but are not limited to, conducting professional development events, serving as consultants, convening and facilitating events, and disseminating information.

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About This Document

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I. Introduction

Purpose of the Review

Finding the Family in Comprehensive School Reform Model: A Guide for Discussion is directed at school and district administrators. It is intended to serve as an aid in determining the degree to which a Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) model supports family and community involvement. The goal of this publication is to

1. Propose a method that school improvement teams can use to assess parent and community involvement in CSR models under consideration for adoption; and
2. Encourage school personnel to use creative approaches to expand family and community involvement in planning and implementing school reform when this component is not emphasized in the model itself.

The Region III Comprehensive Center receives many inquiries from schools and parents regarding the parent involvement component of various CSR models. In response, the Region III Comprehensive Center convened a panel of eight family and community involvement experts to review the parent and community involvement aspect of selected CSR models. The models under consideration were limited to those that have been most frequently adopted by schools and school districts. The panel reviewed these models against the National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs (see Appendix A), which were developed by the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA). The panel examined documentation on the models and rated how well each one meets the standards. The panel did not evaluate whether or not the models are effective as whole-school reform models or whether or not they are effective in promoting family and community involvement per se. Rather the panel focused on the degree to which model documentation provided evidence that parent and family involvement was included in the model and that high quality parent involvement might reasonably be expected if the model was implemented fully and appropriately.

This effort marks the first time that a review of CSR models has been conducted to assess how the models address a specific area of school reform. We caution readers that the findings presented here are not the result of an exhaustive scientific inquiry or evaluation, but the results of a proceedings in which a panel of experts drew preliminary conclusions about the extent to which parent involvement is incorporated into some of the frequently used models. The purpose was not to provide a relative ranking of existing models, but to point administrators and school improvement teams toward an approach that may answer the pertinent questions regarding the appropriateness and extent of a CSR model's plan to incorporate parental/community involvement. When schools are aware from the outset of what their chosen model brings to family and community involvement, they are better able to incorporate additional strategies if needed.

The presentation of the results of this review of CSR models for evidence of parent and community involvement is neither a recommendation nor a criticism of any particular

model. There is no list of “approved” models for parent and community involvement, and the Region III Comprehensive Center strongly discourages states, districts, schools, or others from using the panel’s findings to limit the choice of research-based, effective models by schools that apply for funding under the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program. Rather, this publication proposes a process that will allow decision makers involved in the selection of CSR models to assess the need for additional efforts to support the family and community involvement component of CSR.

Background

Public Law 105-78 is known as the Obey-Porter Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program, after its bipartisan congressional sponsors, Representatives David Obey (D-WI) and John Porter (R-IL). This law provides competitive incentive grants for schools to adopt proven comprehensive school reform models so that all children will meet challenging state content and performance goals. The majority of funding has been directed to Title I schools, with smaller grants allocated to other schools. The first funds became available in July 1998.

As outlined below, the CSRD program identifies nine fundamental components that are essential to any successful reform model. Of key importance is the first requirement that the model must be research based with a record of gains in student achievement and replication in a variety of settings. Component six addresses the importance of the **“meaningful involvement of parents and community in planning and implementing school reform improvement efforts.”**

By including parent involvement as one of the nine components of a comprehensive approach, the CSRD legislation recognized the established role that family and community involvement play in a school’s success. More than 30 years of research has shown that the contributions of parents and families who are effectively engaged in the education of their children play a powerful part in the transformation of schools. Family involvement is not likely to be the primary or sole reason for choosing a CSR model. However, the legislation recognizes that family involvement is a part of any successful school and provides an impetus for school improvement teams to think carefully about the role of family as they implement comprehensive school reform.

Nine Key Components of a Comprehensive Approach

A comprehensive school reform program integrates, in a coherent manner, all nine of the following components:

1. Innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning, teaching, and school management that are based on reliable research and that have been successfully replicated in diverse schools;
2. Comprehensive design with aligned components (including instruction assessment, classroom management, professional development, parental involvement, and school management);

3. Professional development;
4. Measurable goals and benchmarks that are linked to the state's content and performance standards;
5. Support from school faculty, administrators, and staff;
6. Meaningful involvement of parents and community in planning and implementing school reform improvement efforts;
7. External technical support and assistance;
8. Evaluation plan of school reform implementation and student outcomes; and
9. Coordination of resources (federal, state, local) available to the school to sustain the reform effort.

Organization of the Report

Section 2 of this report provides the details of the process used to assess 13 CSR models, including descriptions of the tools used as part of that process. Section 3 presents the findings of the panel review, including highlights of the evidence of support of the National PTA Standards for each of the models considered. Section 4 presents conclusions and recommendations for schools and districts that are in the process of selecting a CSR model. Appendix A provides excerpts from the text of the National PTA Standards for Parental/Family Involvement Programs, and Appendix B identifies selected resources to help guide the model-selection process.

2. Model Review Design and Methods

The Review Tools

The National PTA Standards

The National PTA standards (see Appendix A) are designed as guidelines for schools and other organizations that have programs that serve parents and families. Principals, administrators, educators, and parents are the intended audience of the standards, which were developed in cooperation with educational and parent involvement professionals through the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE). The standards are derived from research conducted during the past 30 years and draw heavily on the research framework of Dr. Joyce L. Epstein, who identified six important types of cooperation among families, schools, and other community organizations. Epstein's six types of parental involvement are the basis for the National PTA standards (shown in Table 2-1).

Table 2-1. Six Standards for Parental/Community Involvement

Standard	Type of Involvement	Description
I	Communicating	Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
II	Parenting	Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
III	Student Learning	Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
IV	Volunteering	Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
V	Decision Making and Advocacy	Parents are full partners in decisions affecting children and families.
VI	Collaborating with Community	Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

Source: National PTA web site, www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/standards/index.asp

A more detailed discussion of the six standards as well as the quality indicators discussed below is available on the National PTA web site at <http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/standards/pfistand.asp#Research> (also see Appendix A).

Quality Indicators

For each of the six program standards there is a corresponding set of quality indicators that identifies the basic elements necessary to realize the standard. The quality indicators illuminate specific practices that contribute to effective family involvement programs and provide a description of how each standard can be met. The quality indicators were designed to assess schools (and to allow schools to self-assess) on the quality and extent of their family involvement practices. The review panel members used the set of quality indicators as a starting point to guide their discussion in determining how effectively each parent involvement standard is represented in the CSR programs as evidenced by materials reviewed. Based on initial findings using the indicators, panelists compiled a narrative summary that described how well the models addressed each of the six standards.

Educators and researchers across the country have endorsed the National PTA's six standards for family/community involvement. These standards, together with their corresponding quality indicators, provide a foundation for assessing approaches to and encouraging meaningful parent, family, and community participation in education. The standards have been widely used by schools to create, evaluate, and improve their programs.

Review Process

The review process consisted of four major steps:

1. Identifying models for review;
2. Collecting information from the developers and from other sources on the parent/community involvement component of their model;
3. Identifying and assembling a panel of qualified individuals to review the parent/community involvement components of those models; and
4. Reviewing the models against the National PTA standards for parent/community involvement and rating how well each model meets the standards.

Identifying the Models for Review

Because of the large number of models available and the limited time and resources, the review was limited to the 13 most frequently adopted CSR models. The specific models to be reviewed were determined by consultation of the CSR model listing in the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) database at www.sedl.org. SEDL maintains a database for the U.S. Department of Education that ranks the CSR models from those serving the largest number of schools to those serving a single school. At the time of inquiry there were 217 model entries in the database. From this list, Center staff elected to review models that had been adopted by 30 or more individual schools. Thirty was selected as a cutoff point because it (1) included the most commonly known models, (2) assured that a reasonably large number of schools are implementing the models reviewed, and (3) provided a manageable number of models for panel review.

The 13 models selected for examination and the number of adoptions as of February 2000 are shown Table 2-2.

Table 2-2. Most Frequently Adopted CSR Models

Model	No. of Adoptions
1. Success for All	248
2. Accelerated Schools	122
3. Lightspan Achieve Now	96
4. Direct Instruction	60
5. America's Choice	60
6. Coalition of Essential Schools	53
7. Co-Nect	49
8. High Schools That Work	48
9. Core Knowledge	45
10. HOSTS	38
11. Effective Schools	36
12. Ventures Initiative & Focus System	33
13. School Development Program— The Comer Model	32

Source: SEDL database, February 11, 2000

Collecting Information on the Models

After determining the 13 models to be included in the review, the Region III Comprehensive Center solicited materials from the model developers that address the extent to which their models incorporate parent and community involvement in the school reform process. Each model developer provided materials. In addition to the materials that came directly from the model developers, the Comprehensive Center compiled other information that is publicly available through SEDL, the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), and the American Institutes of Research (AIR). For example, the *Catalog of School Reform Models* from NWREL and *An Educator's Guide to Schoolwide Reform* from AIR were used as supplemental information. The information reviewed was in print format and was primarily descriptive in nature. The search for materials was not exhaustive and included information provided by model developers along with information available to the general public. No attempt was made to assign relative weights to different types of materials or to search out and favor external evaluations. Materials were photocopied and sent to panelists for their review several weeks prior to the panel meeting.

Establishing the Review Panel

The Region III Comprehensive Center invited leading family and community involvement experts to review the parent involvement component of the selected CSR models as part of a panel assembled for this purpose. Prospective panel members were contacted in writing in February 2000. The panel consisted of representatives of groups such as The National Parent Teachers Association, The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education, the National Education Association, the Center for Applied Linguistics, the Institute for Education and Social Policy, the Comprehensive Center Network, and others.

Reviewing the Models

On May 24 and 25, 2000 the panel reviewed the selected CSR models. Panelists were given their charge by Dr. Charlene Rivera, Director of the Region III Comprehensive Center, with additional comments from Dr. Arthur Gosling, Director of the National Clearinghouse on Comprehensive School Reform; Dr. William Kincaid, Director of the CSRD Program for the U.S. Department of Education (USED); and Pat Gore, Director of the Goals 2000 Office of the USED. Robert Witherspoon facilitated the panel meeting.

The panel reviewed the selected CSR models to determine the extent to which the models address parent/community involvement using the National PTA standards and quality indicators. The whole group of panelists reviewed one model as an example. Panelists were then divided into three groups, with each group responsible for reviewing four of the remaining 12 models. First, each panelist rated each model individually and compiled notes on each model to use in the discussion that followed. After completing individual reviews, the panelists then discussed the models, reached consensus on each of the six standards, and recorded their conclusions on one rating form. Groups submitted to the facilitator the consensus rating form and notes for each model they reviewed. The forms and notes served as the basis of the narrative summaries that are presented in the next section.

Caveat

The panel review is not a formal evaluation of models' parent/community involvement component; rather it is a compilation of expert opinion based on the best materials available at a given point in time. Furthermore, the outcome of the review in no way detracts from the models' inherent strengths and should not be taken as a direct or implied criticism or advocacy of any particular model. Although conclusions were reached about the models reviewed, the primary purpose of this guide is not to rank the various developers' models with regard to parent involvement, but rather to inform school improvement teams about the extent to which models address family involvement, thereby giving teams a jump start in thinking about whether and how they might need to supplement the model they choose for implementation.

3. Review Findings

The panel reviewed each of the models and the materials provided by the developers to determine the extent to which each of the models addresses the National PTA standards. Table 3-1 illustrates the panel consensus on the degree to which each model attained each of the six standards. Narrative summaries of the panel's observations and comments regarding the extent to which the models support and encourage family/community involvement are provided below. The models are listed in alphabetical order; references to specific standards are in bold in the text below.

Accelerated Schools (K–8)

The Accelerated Schools model supports the belief that at-risk students should have the same rich curriculum and instruction as gifted and talented students. The model builds a common purpose within a school, encourages school-wide decision making, and provides a teaching approach that builds on strengths. The Accelerated Schools model received a rating of “consistently or frequently evident” for **school decision making and advocacy** by including parents in important decisions and on advisory committees and task forces. It provides training for parents in key areas, including collaboration and shared decision-making. With regard to **communicating**, the panel recognized that the model encourages reaching out to all parents and provides training in effective communication techniques and gave it a rating of “partially evident” on this standard. Because the model is less specific on standards related to **parenting**, **student learning**, and **volunteering**, it received a rating of “partially evident” in these categories as well. It does not address potential connections to the community in any depth and received a rating of “not evident” on the standard **collaborating with the community**.

America's Choice School Design (K–12)

America's Choice School Design promotes a standards-based curriculum focused on the basics, conceptual mastery, and application of knowledge. The model is structured around five “tasks” (several of which coordinate directly with the National PTA standards):

- Standards and assessment,
- Student learning,
- Teacher training,
- Community supports, and
- Parent-Public involvement.

Communicating is highly supported through materials such as a Home-School Notebook, parent information on standards and expectations, a designated community outreach coordinator, and other means. **Student learning** at home is also strongly

supported by the model through the Home-School Notebook, a 25 Books program, and specific suggestions for strategies (such as parent-monitored reading at home for at least 20 minutes per day). **Parenting** is not an explicit focus of the model. However, because America's Choice underscores the value of positive relationships between parents and children and the importance of linking parents to programs and resources in the community this component was rated "partially evident" for the model. Although **volunteering** and **collaborating with the community** are not central elements of America's Choice this model does offer a diagnostic tool for the assessment of public engagement. Parent participation in **school decision making and advocacy** is not an element of this model.

Table 3-1. Summary of the Extent to Which Selected CSR Models Support and Encourage Family and Community Involvement*

Model	Standard					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Accelerated Schools	■	■	■	■	■	■
America's Choice	■	■	■	■	■	■
Coalition of Essential Schools	■	•	■	•	■	■
Co-nect	■	■	■	■	■	■
Core Knowledge	■	■	■	■	■	■
Direct Instruction	■	■	■	■	•	•
Effective Schools	•	•	•	•	•	•
High Schools That Work	■	■	■	■	■	■
HOSTS	■	■	■	■	■	■
Lightspan Achieve Now	■	■	■	■	■	■
School Development Program—Comer	■	■	■	■	■	■
Success for All	■	■	■	■	■	■
Ventures Initiative & Focus System	■	■	■	■	■	■

KEY

Standard I	=	Communicating	Standard IV	=	Volunteering
Standard II	=	Parenting	Standard V	=	School Decision Making & Advocacy
Standard III	=	Student Learning	Standard VI	=	Collaborating With Community

- Standard consistently or frequently evident in the materials examined by the panel
- Standard partially evident in the materials examined by the panel
- Standard not evident in the materials examined by the panel
- Standard not an aspect of the model

* Panel findings summarized in this table are not the result of a formal evaluation and hence are not meant to be understood as conclusive. The results represented are intended only to inform school improvement teams about the extent to which family and community involvement is addressed by particular CSR models.

Coalition of Essential Schools (K–8)

Coalition of Essential Schools provides a set of core principles that guide school reform. Family/community outreach is an important component of the model, especially in defining student goals and involving families in school design. Panelists found substantial evidence of **communicating** and **collaborating with community**. The program calls for both communication from the school to the family and from the family to the school and suggests that a primary topic of this two-way communication is progress on student work. The program encourages collaboration with the community by engaging citizens and organizations in the redesign of the school. The model calls for studying the community's demographics so as to gain an in-depth understanding of the needs and goals of the people served by the school on the rationale that engagement is promoted when citizens see the school as an integral part of the larger community. The model also calls for working with other schools. Partial evidence was found for **student learning** in the model's use of parent centers as a way to support parents in developing skills for looking at student work and understanding student learning. In regard to **school decision making and advocacy**, parents are encouraged to serve on leadership teams that are charged with implementing the school's core principles. As the materials reviewed provided little evidence that Coalition provides guidance on **volunteering** and **parenting**, these standards were rated as "not evident" for this model.

Co-Nect (K–12)

The primary goal of Co-nect Schools is to improve achievement in core subjects. It calls for schoolwide accountability and the reorganization of schools into learning communities guided by high expectations for all students. Parent/family standards are addressed to some degree across the board. In support of the standard for **communicating**, parent-teacher conferences are called for twice a year. In terms of **parenting**, the model insists that schools reach out to all families, not just those who come to meetings. However, it does not address family diversity in terms of parenting styles and beliefs. The model includes workshops to help parents understand **student learning** but provides no guidance to help parents foster learning at home. The Co-nect Schools model educates staff members on how to build a good atmosphere for **volunteering** but does not specifically support parents in this endeavor. **Support for school decision making and advocacy** is addressed through parent participation on design and decision-making teams. "Community portfolio audits" help foster **collaborating with the community** by providing opportunities for school staff, parents, and community members to review the contents of a sample of student portfolios and evaluate the work using a set of scoring rubrics.

Core Knowledge (K–8)

Core Knowledge, a curriculum approach that uses common core concepts, skills, and knowledge, strives to help students become "culturally literate." Panelists found substantial evidence of two standards in the materials they reviewed. There is a general plan for **volunteering**, which provides many opportunities for parents to volunteer in a variety of roles. Although this model does not show much support for non-English speaking parents, adjust for parent schedules, or provide childcare, reviewers found

enough evidence for this model's support of **communicating** in other ways to gave it an overall rating of "consistently or frequently evident" for this standard. The panelists found some evidence that the model addresses **parenting** through parent resource centers that support families with training, resources, and other services. Core Knowledge also stresses the importance of culture in its goals in supporting **parenting**, but offers little outreach to parents who are not already coming to the school. Reviewers found partial evidence that the program supports **student learning**, especially through encouraging parent involvement in decisions regarding their children, informing parents of student expectations, providing information for assisting and monitoring homework, and generally keeping parents informed about student progress. The model incorporates some aspects of **collaborating with community** by providing family support services and adult learning opportunities. Parent involvement and consensus building (**school decision making and advocacy**) also contribute to the success of Core Knowledge, which includes parents in obtaining resources, planning activities, and developing a schoolwide plan.

Direct Instruction

The goal of Direct Instruction is to improve academic performance so that students are at least a year and a half beyond grade level by 5th grade. The program offers a highly prescriptive, carefully focused instructional format. Panelists found little evidence that parent/family involvement is a priority for Direct Instruction. There is some evidence that this model supports **parenting** skills in that it encourages parents to be "teachers of both academic and social behavioral skills." It does not, however, offer specific guidance in this area. To support **student learning**, Direct Instruction has a "Parent and Child Home Practice Guide" that is to be sent home. The model encourages parental **volunteering** to teach skills and reduce absences. There is little or no evidence of parent/community involvement in **school decision making and advocacy** or **collaboration with the community**, although parent workers do assist in linking families to social services in some schools. Opportunities for **communicating** are minimal and primarily one-way, school to parent.

Effective Schools

The Center for Effective Schools model is based on the research of Dr. Ron Edmonds, which made a vital contribution to school reform and improvement. Essential elements of Effective Schools include

- strong instructional leadership,
- high expectations,
- a clear and focused school mission,
- frequent assessment of progress, and
- time on task.

Parent/family involvement does not appear to be a focus in this CSR model, and it received rating of "not evident" for all six standards. **Communication** appears to be unidirectional, from school to parents, and parents are assumed to understand and support

the school's mission. **Parenting, student learning, school decision making and advocacy**, and **collaborating with community** are not addressed by the model. **Volunteering** is minimally covered with mention that parents can "play a role" in helping the school to achieve its mission.

High Schools That Work

High Schools That Work aims to increase the achievement of career-bound students by blending traditional college-prep studies with vocational and technical courses. The main feature is common planning time with teachers. The model is among the strongest of the 13 under review for providing comprehensive parent participation opportunities. This model places a strong emphasis on **communicating** and provides a variety of methods to build relationships with families, such as "good news promotions," regular phone communication between teachers and families on student progress, exchange days, and joint planning. The model values and respects parents and the importance of **parenting** by including parents in the development of the student program of study and in the setting of goals. Parents are encouraged to talk with school staff about expectations for **student learning** for each grade level. The program also supports parents as **volunteers** (for which it received a rating of "consistently or frequently evident") and in **school decision making and advocacy** (for which it received a rating of "partially evident") by fostering shared leadership and family/community involvement through school advisory councils composed of students, parents, teachers, community members, and business leaders. In High Schools That Work, parents serve on teams that identify competencies and appropriate activities, and members of the community (**collaborating with community**) play active roles as mentors and advisors. Overall, parent and community involvement are highly supported in this model.

HOSTS

HOSTS (Helping One Student to Succeed) is a mentoring program in which community volunteers provide one-on-one instruction in language arts, math, and/or Spanish to low-achieving students. The model requires participating teachers to be willing to collaborate with these trained mentors. Although parents and community members provide the primary service in this model, HOSTS does not emphasize specific family/community standards. It shows partial evidence of addressing **student learning**; however, **student learning** activities are limited to workshops that assist parents in understanding how they can help students improve their skills and get help where needed. There is also some evidence of **collaborating with community**, primarily through business partnerships that provide mentors and volunteers. The model calls for parent conferences twice a year but no other formal two-way contact (**communicating**). The program does not directly address **parenting** skills. HOSTS does not support **volunteering** or parent participation in decision making (**school decision making and advocacy**).

Lightspan Achieve Now

Lightspan is the largest source of interactive educational activities and curricula available on the Internet. It also offers curriculum-based educational software products and services. Lightspan emphasizes the importance of family involvement in homework and

increasing time on task to improve student achievement. Because this model encourages families to work together using Playstation™ hardware and instructional software at home, Lightspan received a rating of “consistently or frequently evident” for **student learning**. The materials reviewed provided some evidence of meeting the **communicating** standard by incorporating two-way communication between home and school. Lightspan does not emphasize the development of **parenting** skills. Few opportunities are provided for **volunteering** or **decision making and advocacy** within the school. (The only decision parents can make is whether or not they want to participate in the program.) Lightspan does not highlight **community involvement**.

School Development Program—The Comer Model

The School Development Program model is firmly rooted in the philosophy that children learn better through strong relationships with adults who occupy key roles in their lives—parents, teachers, and community members. The model builds three levels of family participation in schools:

- general support of activities,
- daily school activities, and
- school management.

This model showed evidence of strongly addressing five out of six standards. The model encourages parents and educators to share information about student strengths and learning preferences (**communicating**). **Parenting** is strongly supported by resource centers offering training, resources, and other services. Parents help set **student learning** goals each year and assist in developing a personalized education plan for each student. **Decision making and advocacy** are highly valued, with PTAs and other parent groups encouraged to participate fully. **Collaborating with community** agencies is strong: The program offers links to family support services and adult learning opportunities. The model provides little opportunity for parent **volunteering**, although community members are encouraged to volunteer.

Success for All

Success for All, developed by Dr. Robert Slavin, focuses on the reading skills of at-risk students. The model requires each school to have a family support team to encourage parent support and involvement and to address problems at home that affect a student’s ability to learn in school. **Collaborating with community** through the establishment of partnerships with local businesses and service groups is a strong feature of this model. The model also strongly supports **parenting** by addressing home and parenting issues that affect **student learning** (although there was little evidence that the program provides opportunity for parents to talk with teachers about home activities). **Communicating** with families was partially evident in materials reviewed; however, translation of materials for non-English speaking parents is not addressed. The program shows partial evidence of addressing the standard on **volunteering** and does not encourage or address parent **decision making and advocacy** in a substantial way.

Ventures Initiative and Focus System

The Ventures Initiative and Focus System attempts to raise academic performance by developing teachers' ability to use student-centered, inquiry-based instructional strategies. The program does *not* feature elements specifically designed to foster **communicating** with parents, help parents improve their **parenting skills**, increase parents' understanding of how they can contribute to **student learning**, encourage parent **volunteering**, **school decision making and advocacy** activities, or promote **collaborating with the community**.

Summary

The panel of experts examined the extent to which the 13 selected models provided evidence of meeting the National PTA Standards. An observation that a standard is “not evident” is not per se a criticism of the model, but simply indicates that efforts to meet it were not observed in the materials provided for the review. School and district improvement teams considering models for implementation in their schools should take the panel findings as a starting point rather than a final conclusion. Improvement teams are urged to use the PTA standards for parental involvement to conduct their own reviews of models in which they are interested. Such reviews might include reviews of print material and observation/questioning at visits to schools that are already implementing the model. The important thing is that schools have an accurate idea of the extent to which the model they choose incorporates high quality parent involvement so that they can be prepared to supplement the model when necessary.

4. Conclusion

This review brings together the results of a team of experts who considered the role of family and community involvement in the most commonly used Comprehensive School Reform models. This effort to assess the extent to which a model addresses a specific area of school reform is the first of its kind. This review is intended to contribute to a knowledge base that will help schools implementing CSR models to address the primary components of comprehensive school reform outlined in the original CSR legislation.

Selecting a CSR model is one of the biggest decisions a school will ever make. Comprehensive school reform embraces fundamental change that involves all the main components of school life—organization, structure, communication, policy, and regulations. Decisions about whole-school reform affect the lives and work of students, teachers, administrators, and parents for years to come. Like a family choosing a home, a school improvement team needs to ask many questions about CSR models to be good consumers and to make sure the “fit” is right. Some key questions include

- How does the CSR model complement the school’s programs and philosophy?
- How does the CSR model match the school’s need?
- How does the CSR model address each of the nine components of comprehensive school reform, including supporting family and community values and programs?
- Is the school prepared to supplement a model when needed to ensure that all nine components are addressed?

Many schools have discovered that families and the community can have a real impact on student success, and this has been confirmed by extensive research conducted over the past 30 years. These schools make it possible for parents and community members to support students’ learning and to take part in important decisions about their schools. When selecting a CSR model, schools should study the models carefully to determine the extent to which each model encourages and supports family/community involvement. As shown by this review, CSR models vary in how they address involvement: Some support it directly, whereas others do not address this issue at all.

Every school has a different process for making school reform decisions. Whether a school has an official school improvement/site-based management team or something more informal, the following questions will help a school team begin gathering the best information about family and community involvement in CSR models.

Before addressing these questions, be sure to collect the materials you need about each model under consideration, including model descriptions, examples of how the models

have been used at other schools, and evidence that the models work. It would also be helpful to review the National PTA standards for parent involvement, located in Appendix A of this document, and the resources highlighted in Appendix B. Then ask these four questions:

1. What do we believe about the role of families and the community in student success?

What is currently being done in the school that supports family and community involvement? Which kind of involvement works best to support school goals? Make a list of the most important beliefs about family and community involvement. Include short descriptions of the programs already in place that support the involvement of family and community members.

2. How does each CSR model support local views and values about parent/community involvement?

How do the models match up to the National PTA standards? How do they match up to the school's family and community involvement values? Make a simple chart like the one in Section 3 to compare the CSR models under consideration. Make notes assessing the extent to which each model supports or encourages involvement. Discuss the differences.

3. How can this report's conclusions be utilized in making a decision about a CSR model?

What model(s) best support the school's family/community involvement values? How will the final decision about a CSR model be made? When is the best time to raise these questions? Reflect on the findings and conclusions and then advocate for a model that considers the involvement issue.

4. How can the chosen model be adjusted to strengthen family/community involvement?

What family/community components could be added? Does the CSR model connect with existing programs? How? Few CSR models will fully meet the family and community needs of a school. Take steps to build on the CSR model where necessary to strengthen family and community involvement.

Recommendations

The expert review of the 13 most frequently used CSR models resulted in the following recommendations:

- The single most important recommendation that can be made is that schools take care to address adequately all types of family involvement in their plans and programs, even if they are not included in the CSR model that a school selects. Selection of a good model may take a school a long way toward comprehensive school reform, but at the end of the day the school is responsible for ensuring that all nine components of CSR are covered, including the parent involvement component. It is never safe to assume that a model provides all the answers to a school's needs.
- In the process of selecting a school reform model, schools, parents, and community groups should make use of the assessment method set forth in this publication.

Although schools may use the findings of this report to identify the need to supplement the parent/family/community involvement aspect of specific models, perhaps the greatest usefulness of this document is the process it establishes for the review of the models under consideration. The questions outlined above provide a frame that a school can use to think about any reform model—not just the ones that were reviewed by the panel. Similarly, the National PTA standards are a useful tool for identifying areas of family involvement that the school will need to supplement when a particular model is adopted.

- Finally, we urge district and school improvement teams to take advantage of the resources that are available for comprehensive school reform. The resources in Appendix B of this document are a good starting point. In addition to those items listed in the appendix, both the Regional Educational Laboratories and the Comprehensive Centers may have information available through their websites; and some may have staff available for process consultation.

In addition to these general recommendations, the panel also made a series of specific recommendations to schools that are in the process of selecting and implementing CSR models:

- Needs assessments carried out prior to the selection of CSR models should include perspectives from families, rather than being restricted to the perspectives of school staff. Careful definition of school needs is the first step in identifying a model that will work for the school, and

therefore it is critical that families and school staff agree about what the schools' needs are. Surveys, focus groups, and other discussion methods are all effective ways of making parents' voices heard in the needs assessment process. Parent representation on the school improvement team that defines needs assessment methods and analyzes needs data is also highly desirable.

- As the school develops a consensus to adopt a particular model, the buy-in of families is just as important as the buy-in of school staff: Consensus of families is needed at the model selection stage as well as at the time of the decision to renew a CSR model.
- Families want to understand how the school teaches their children. This requires that families understand the model, its components, and how it works. To accomplish this, families should take the opportunity to visit other schools and districts that are using the model, participate in ongoing training that supports model implementation, and tour the school and visit classrooms once the model is implemented.
- Families are concerned about the individual needs of their children. How a model affects or includes students with disabilities, students who are English language learners, or who have other diversity issues should be discussed publicly and factored into the model selection decision.
- Each school should employ a family-centered approach regardless of the specific model it chooses. This approach includes the designation of an outreach coordinator who uses multiple methods to maintain communication with families and who takes care to address all the types of parent involvement specified in the National PTA standards.

Ensuring that CSR model chosen by a school is part of a comprehensive plan to include families is crucial to the success of the school and, ultimately, to the success of the students.

Appendix A



National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

National PTA Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs

Of the nine key components of Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) provided in Section 1 of this report, the sixth relates specifically to parental involvement: *Meaningful involvement of parents and community in planning and implementing school reform improvement efforts.*

The National PTA has developed a set of six standards for determining the extent to which a program conforms with the principles of parent and family involvement (see Table 2-1). These standards, along with “quality indicators,” which indicate key elements that must be present to realize the benefits of the given standard, are excerpted from the National PTA web site (<http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/standards/index.asp>) and provided here with permission from the National PTA.

Please visit the site for additional information on sample applications, program orientation, and building partnerships.

Introduction

Over 30 years’ research has proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent* involvement and student success. Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs and their quality indicators are research based and grounded in both sound philosophy and practical experience. The purpose for the standards is threefold:

- To promote meaningful parent and family participation
- To raise awareness regarding the components of effective programs
- To provide guidelines for schools** that wish to improve their programs

The program standards are guidelines for leaders of institutions with programs serving parents and families. Therefore, the intended audience includes principals, administrators, educators, and parents who are in positions to influence and improve parent involvement programs. When the standards are used as guidelines, they can direct leaders as they move from discussion to action in developing dynamic programs to improve student achievement through parent involvement. As with any effective long-term reform, the

*Throughout this document are references to “parent” involvement. All such references may be interpreted broadly to include the adults who play an important role in a child’s family life, since other adults—grandparents, aunts, uncles, step-parents, guardians—may carry the primary responsibility for a child’s education, development, and well-being.

**Throughout this document are references to “schools.” All such references may be interpreted broadly to include other programs that serve children and families, i.e., other academic, specialty, or community programs.

overall integration and implementation of standards should be based on local needs and circumstances.

In the midst of the current climate of education reform, National PTA maintains what numerous research studies and years of experience as advocates on behalf of children have demonstrated to be true: ***Parent and family involvement increases student achievement and success.***

The overall importance of parent and family involvement, as the foundation for all other education reforms, warrants the same consideration and attention as other areas for which national standards are being developed. Therefore, the establishment of standards to guide parent involvement programs and evaluate their quality and effectiveness is crucial.

The National Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs were developed by the National PTA in cooperation with education and parent involvement professionals through the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE). Building upon the six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce L. Epstein, Ph.D., of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, National PTA created program standards of excellence. These standards, together with their corresponding quality indicators, were created to be used in conjunction with other national standards and reform initiatives in support of children's learning and success.

In recent years, through unwavering advocacy efforts, National PTA secured parent involvement as one of the eight National Education Goals: Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional and academic growth of children.

Research studies indicate that although the six program standards are closely related, each produces distinct, and in many cases, unique gains for students, parents, or schools. **Quality indicators**, listed with each program standard, identify the important elements of each standard if those distinctions and unique gains are to be realized. They inform local leaders about what contributes to effective programs and fosters success.

Standard I

Communicating

Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Communication is the foundation of a solid partnership. When parents and educators communicate effectively, positive relationships develop, problems are more easily solved, and students make greater progress.

Too often school or program communication is one-way without the chance to exchange ideas and share perceptions. Effective home-school communication is the two-way sharing of information vital to student success. Even parent-teacher conferences can be

one-way if the goal is merely reporting student progress. Partnering requires give-and-take conversation, goal setting for the future, and regular follow-up interactions.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium.
2. Establish opportunities for parents and educators to share partnering information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
3. Provide clear information regarding course expectations and offerings, student placement, school activities, student services, and optional programs.
4. Mail report cards and regular progress reports to parents. Provide support services and follow-up conferences as needed.
5. Disseminate information on school reforms, policies, discipline procedures, assessment tools, and school goals, and include parents in any related decision-making process.
6. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year, with follow-up as needed. These should accommodate the varied schedules of parents, language barriers, and the need for child care.
7. Encourage immediate contact between parents and teachers when concerns arise.
8. Distribute student work for parental comment and review on a regular basis.
9. Translate communications to assist non-English-speaking parents.
10. Communicate with parents regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just regarding misbehavior or failure.
11. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with principals and other administrative staff.
12. Promote informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact.
13. Provide staff development regarding effective communication techniques and the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and the family.

Standard II

Parenting

Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Parents are a child's life support system. Consequently, the most important support a child can receive comes from the home.

School personnel and program staff support positive parenting by respecting and affirming the strengths and skills needed by parents to fulfill their role. From making sure that students arrive at school rested, fed, and ready to learn, to setting high learning expectations and nurturing self-esteem, parents sustain their children's learning.

When staff members recognize parent roles and responsibilities, ask parents what supports they need, and work to find ways to meet those needs, they communicate a clear message to parents: "We value you and need your input" in order to maintain a high-quality program.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children.
2. Link parents to programs and resources within the community that provide support services to families.
3. Reach out to all families, not just those who attend parent meetings.
4. Establish policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity.
5. Provide an accessible parent/family information and resource center to support parents and families with training, resources, and other services.
6. Encourage staff members to demonstrate respect for families and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

Standard III

Student Learning

Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Student learning increases when parents are invited into the process by helping at home. Enlisting parents' involvement provides educators and administrators with a valuable support system-creating a team that is working for each child's success.

The vast majority of parents are willing to assist their students in learning, but many times are not sure what assistance is most helpful and appropriate. Helping parents connect to their children's learning enables parents to communicate in powerful ways that they value what their children achieve. Whether it's working together on a computer, displaying student work at home, or responding to a particular class assignment, parents' actions communicate to their children that education is important.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Seek and encourage parental participation in decision-making that affects students.
2. Inform parents of the expectations for students in each subject at each grade level.
3. Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework, and give feedback to teachers.
4. Regularly assign interactive homework that will require students to discuss and interact with their parents about what they are learning in class.
5. Sponsor workshops or distribute information to assist parents in understanding how students can improve skills, get help when needed, meet class expectations, and perform well on assessments.
6. Involve parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for post-secondary education and careers. Encourage the development of a personalized education plan for each student, where parents are full partners.
7. Provide opportunities for staff members to learn and share successful approaches to engaging parents in their child's education.

Standard IV

Volunteering

Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

When parents volunteer, both families and schools reap benefits that come in few other ways. Literally millions of dollars of volunteer services are performed by parents and family members each year in the public schools. Studies have concluded that volunteers express greater confidence in the schools where they have opportunities to participate regularly. In addition, assisting in school or program events/activities communicates to a child, “I care about what you do here.”

In order for parents to feel appreciated and welcome, volunteer work must be meaningful and valuable to them. Capitalizing on the expertise and skills of parents and family members provides much needed support to educators and administrators already taxed in their attempts to meet academic goals and student needs.

Although there are many parents for whom volunteering during school hours is not possible, creative solutions like before- or after-school “drop-in” programs or “at home” support activities provide opportunities for parents to offer their assistance as well.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Ensure that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances, and any other interaction with parents create a climate in which parents feel valued and welcome.
2. Survey parents regarding their interests, talents, and availability, then coordinate the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.
3. Ensure that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given the options for helping in other ways, at home or place of employment.
4. Organize an easy, accessible program for utilizing parent volunteers, providing ample training on volunteer procedures and school protocol.
5. Develop a system for contacting all parents to assist as the year progresses.
6. Design opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by addressing child care, transportation, work schedule needs, and so forth
7. Show appreciation for parents’ participation, and value their diverse contributions.
8. Educate and assist staff members in creating an inviting climate and effectively utilizing volunteer resources.
9. Ensure that volunteer activities are meaningful and built on volunteer interests and abilities.

Standard V

School Decision Making and Advocacy

Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

Studies have shown that schools where parents are involved in decision making and advocacy have higher levels of student achievement and greater public support.

Effective partnerships develop when each partner is respected and empowered to fully participate in the decision-making process. Schools and programs that actively enlist parent participation and input communicate that parents are valued as full partners in the educating of their children.

Parents and educators depend on shared authority in decision-making systems to foster parental trust, public confidence, and mutual support of each other's efforts in helping students succeed. The involvement of parents, as individuals or as representative of others, is crucial in collaborative decision-making processes on issues from curriculum and course selection, to discipline policies and over-all school reform measures.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Provide understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions, and resolving problems.
2. Encourage the formation of PTAs or other parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.
3. Include parents on all decision-making and advisory committees, and ensure adequate training for such areas as policy, curriculum, budget, school reform initiatives, safety, and personnel. Where site governance bodies exist, give equal representation to parents.
4. Provide parents with current information regarding school policies, practices, and both student and school performance data.
5. Enable parents to participate as partners when setting school goals, developing or evaluating programs and policies, or responding to performance data.
6. Encourage and facilitate active parent participation in the decisions that affect students, such as student placement, course selection, and individual personalized education plans.
7. Treat parental concerns with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions.

8. Promote parent participation on school district, state, and national committees and issues.
9. Provide training for staff and parents on collaborative partnering and shared decision making.

Standard VI

Collaborating With Community

Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.

As part of the larger community, schools and other programs fulfill important community goals. In like fashion, communities offer a wide array of resources valuable to schools and the families they serve.

When schools and communities work together, both are strengthened in synergistic ways and make gains that outpace what either entity could accomplish on its own:

- Families access community resources more easily;
- Businesses connect education programs with the realities of the workplace;
- Seniors contribute wisdom and gain a greater sense of purpose; and ultimately,
- Students serve and learn beyond their school involvement.

The best partnerships are mutually beneficial and structured to connect individuals, not just institutions or groups. This connection enables the power of community partnerships to be unleashed.

Quality Indicators

Successful programs:

1. Distribute information regarding cultural, recreational, academic, health, social, and other resources that serve families within the community.
2. Develop partnerships with local business and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
3. Encourage employers to adopt policies and practices that promote and support adult participation in children's education.
4. Foster student participation in community service.
5. Involve community members in school volunteer programs.
6. Disseminate information to the school community, including those without school-age children, regarding school programs and performance.

7. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support education.

8. Inform staff members of the resources available in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

Appendix B



Selected Resources

Selected Resources

These resources may prove useful to school improvement teams in the process of collecting information about CSR models and family/community involvement standards:

American Institutes for Research. (1999). *An educator's guide to schoolwide reform*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.aasa.org/reform>

Catalog of school reform models. (1998). Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory. Retrieved from www.nwrel.org/scpd/catalog/index.shtml

Epstein, J. (1997). *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Epstein, J. (2001). *School and Family Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Gaining Ground newsletter. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Henderson, A. & Berla, N. (1994). *A new generation of evidence: The family is critical to student achievement*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education.

Lewis, A., & Henderson, A. (1997). *Urgent message: Families crucial to school reform*. Washington, DC: Center for Law and Education.

National Parent Teacher Association. (2000). *Building successful partnerships—A Guide for Developing Parent and Family Involvement Programs*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Educational Service.

National Parent Teacher Association. (1998). *National standards for parent/family involvement programs*. Chicago: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/standards/index.asp>

RMC Research Corporation. (2000). *Creating family friendly schools: A guidebook for trainers*. Denver, CO: Author.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). (2001, August 20). Database of schools awarded CSRD funds. Retrieved from <http://www.sedl.org/csrd/awards.html>

The following briefs comprise the *CSR Briefs* series published by The Region III Comprehensive Center at The George Washington University Center for Excellence and Equity in Education. These briefs highlight key issues related to the implementation of Comprehensive School Reform:

Barnes, E., Jr. (April, 1999). Aligning resources to support and sustain comprehensive educational reform. *CSR Briefs*, 1(6).

Gonzales, J. (March, 1999). How well do models meet requirements of the comprehensive school reform demonstration program? *CSR Briefs*, 1(2).

Keirstead, C. (March, 1999). Readiness for CSRD. *CSR Briefs*, 1(3).

Keirstead, C. (March, 1999). The right fit: Finding a CSRD model to meet school needs. *CSR Briefs*, 1(5).

Russell, W. (March, 1999). Comprehensive school reform and CSRD. *CSR Briefs*, 1(1).

Vincent, C. (February, 1999). Integrating comprehensive school reform: Demonstration program models into data-driven school improvement. *CSR Briefs*, 1(4).

Witherspoon, B., & Brown, J. (March, 1999). Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program: The importance of parents and the community. *CSR Briefs*, 1(7).

Other resources may be found on the Center for Equity and Excellence in Education's web site at http://www.ceee.gwu.edu/parent_community/iresource.htm.

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